

The Languages of Belonging:  
Heritage Language and Sense of Belonging in Clubs and Organizations

by

Louel Isaac Ibe

World Languages & Cultures Department

College of Liberal Arts

California Polytechnic State University

San Luis Obispo

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## APPROVAL PAGE

TITLE: The Languages of Belonging: Heritage Language  
and Sense of Belonging in Clubs and Organizations

AUTHOR: Louel Isaac Ibe

DATE SUBMITTED: June, 2020

Dr. Silvia Marijuan

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Senior Project Advisor



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Signature

World Languages & Cultures Department  
College of Liberal Arts

California Polytechnic State University  
San Luis Obispo

June, 2020

Dr. Silvia Marijuan

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Senior Project Advisor



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Signature

Dr. John Thompson

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WLC Outcomes Committee Chair

  
[John Thompson \(Jun 16, 2020 10:59 PDT\)](#)

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Signature

Dr. Fernando Sanchez

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Department Chair



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Signature

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## **I. Abstract**

As a culminating project for a graduate in Modern Languages & Literatures and Comparative Ethnic Studies, this research paper focuses on the concepts of sense of belonging in institutions of higher education, specifically in relation to the presence of heritage languages within cultural clubs and organizations. It explores this relationship through a survey sent to Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo students involved in various cultural clubs and organizations, exploring their feelings of sense of belonging as tied to the university in general, alongside their club/organization, while also inquiring about the presence of their heritage language in various spaces at the university. This study provides insight on the current presence of heritage languages in cultural clubs and organizations and their efforts in maintaining that presence, alongside the ways that this presence can foster a sense of belonging in students. It is supplemented with a literature review on previous research done on sense of belonging and heritage languages, alongside a reflection on my own experiences throughout this project. In all, the purpose of this research project is to explore whether the presence of heritage languages within cultural clubs and organizations affects a student's sense of belonging at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo and to lay groundwork for possible future research within the fields of linguistics, ethnic studies, and higher education student development.

## ***Resumen***

Como un proyecto que marca la culminación de un estudiante de Modern Languages & Literatures y Comparative Ethnic Studies, este artículo se enfoca en los conceptos del sentido de pertenencia en las instituciones de educación superior, en particular, la presencia de lenguas de herencias en los clubs y las organizaciones culturales. Se investiga esta relación a través de una

encuesta enviada a los estudiantes de Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo quienes son miembros de los clubs y organizaciones culturales. Se pregunta a los estudiantes sobre sus experiencias del sentido de pertenencia en la universidad, en general, pero también en su club/organización, además la presencia de sus lenguas de herencia en varias partes de la universidad. Este artículo va a aclarar la presencia actual de las lenguas de herencia en los clubs y las organizaciones culturales, cómo se mantiene esa presencia, y en qué maneras esa presencia puede crear o desarrollar más el sentido de pertenencia en los estudiantes. Este proyecto también incluye una revisión de la literatura anterior sobre el sentido de pertenencia y las lenguas de herencia con una reflexión personal a mi experiencia durante el trabajo del proyecto. Para resumir, el objetivo de esta investigación es aprender si la presencia de las lenguas de herencia en los clubs y las organizaciones culturales afecta el sentido de los estudiantes de Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo y establecer el trabajo preliminar para las investigaciones en el futuro dentro de los campos de la lingüística, los estudios étnicos, y el desarrollo estudiantil.

## **II. Introduction & Purpose**

For decades, researchers within higher education have looked at the concept of sense of belonging and the ways that sense of belong has played a part in student experiences. As someone who has been involved in student affairs as part of my undergraduate experience at Cal Poly, from being a Resident Advisor for University Housing to a Student Assistant to the Cross Cultural Centers, I had found myself interested in the factors and experiences that affected other students' sense of belonging. Much more, within the academic side of my time at Cal Poly, I was able to explore topics surrounding heritage language, immigrants, and community as a Modern Languages & Literatures and Comparative Ethnic Studies student. Eventually, this became the topic that I wanted to explore as a result of my interests and passions: if the presence of heritage language will affect a students' sense of belonging.

When looking at my senior project thought, I realize that looking at heritage language within the university overall is an extensive task, where we can look at things such as students taking language classes in their heritage classes, meeting faculty with similar ethnic and cultural backgrounds, or even meeting peers who speak their heritage language. As a result, I specifically looked at clubs and organizations—a factor cited by Terrell Strayhorn to improve student's sense of belonging within *College Students' Sense of Belonging: A Key to Educational Success for All Students*. This, alongside Joseph Berger and Jeffrey Milem's theory of college involvement, become the foundational framework in looking at clubs and organizations and how the presence of heritage language can play a role in fostering a student's sense of belong.

In the development of this senior project, I had three research questions in mind:

### **Research Questions:**



**RQ1:** What is the relationship between heritage language learning/maintenance and sense of belonging in the environment of higher education?

**RQ2:** How does the presence of heritage language in cultural clubs and organizations affect a student's sense of belong?

**RQ3:** What infrastructure and scaffolding within cultural clubs and organizations promote heritage language learning and maintenance?

As a result, the hope of the research project is to better understand how sense of belong is fostered for students who hold ties to their heritage culture and language, the role that cultural clubs and organizations play in developing a sense of belonging for their members and how heritage language is present in their infrastructure and scaffolding, and lastly the ways that institutions of higher education hold space for heritage languages outside of academic settings.

It is important to note that this research was conducted during Spring of 2020 and on, during which COVID-19 has pushed Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo to move to an online platform as a means to result the spread of the virus. As a result, the data of the research will reflect the current situations of the time, not only focusing on the physical spaces are created, curated, and cultivate by cultural clubs and organizations, but also the now more-present online spaces to where they have shifted their programming.

### III. Research Methodology

For the purposes of this research paper, a 32-question anonymous online survey was sent out by email to various Cal Poly cultural clubs and organizations to receive responses on their experiences as part of cultural clubs or organizations. The survey composed of mostly Likert-scale questions with short answer questions, in addition to demographic questions. The questions are broken down into the following sections: demographic information, sense of belonging, institutional experiences with cultural heritage, institutional experience with heritage language, and cultural club/organization experiences. The questions asked are as followed:

#### **Demographic information**

Years at Institution: ( 1 / 2 / 3 / 4 / 5 )

Are you an undergrad or post-graduate student? (Undergraduate / Post-graduate)

Are you a transfer student? (Yes / No)

Are you a first-generation student? (Yes / No)

Are you part of a cultural club or organization? (Yes / No)

Are you part of a language club or organization? (Yes / No)

Do you speak languages other than English? (Yes / No)

What languages were spoken in your household growing up? ( \_\_\_\_\_ )

*All of the following questions are Likert-scale questions.*

#### **Sense of Belonging**

I feel a sense of belonging at my institution.

I feel a sense of belonging due to my interactions with faculty (professors, lecturers, etc.).

I feel a sense of belonging due to my interactions with staff (academic advisors, cultural center coordinators, etc.).

I feel a sense of belonging due to my involvement (clubs, Greek life, etc.)

I feel a sense of belonging due to my interactions with my peers.

*All of the following questions are Likert-scale questions but have a provided textbox available for further elaboration and explanation of their choices.*

#### **Institutional Experience with Cultural Heritage**

My institution acknowledges my cultural heritage.

There are spaces (physical or online) to celebrate and/or practice my cultural heritage at my institution.

I am able to positively develop my identity and its connections to my cultural heritage at my institution.

The presence of my cultural heritage in my institution helps/would help my sense of belonging.

**Institutional Experience with Heritage Language**

My institution acknowledges my heritage language.

There are spaces (physical or online) to learn and/or maintain my heritage language at my institution OUTSIDE of language learning classes.

The presence of my heritage language in my institution helps/would help my sense of belonging.

I am able to positively develop my identity and its connections to my heritage language at my institution.

**Cultural Club/Organization Experiences**

My club or organization helps/has helped develop my sense of belonging.

My club or organization is a space (physical or online) to celebrate and/or practice my cultural heritage.

I am able to positively develop my identity and its connections to my cultural heritage due to my club or organization.

The presence of my cultural heritage in my club or organization helps/would help my sense of belonging.

My club or organization is a space (physical or online) to learn and/or maintain my heritage language.

The presence of my heritage language in my club or organization helps/would help my sense of belonging.

I am able to positively develop my identity and its connections to my heritage language due to my club or organization.

*The following questions are short answer. Survey takers can give as many or little information as they would like.*

In what ways does your club or organization develop a sense of belonging between for and between members?

Does heritage language learning and/or maintenance have a presence in your organization? If so, how? If not, is there a reason why there is no presence?

Overall, do you think the presence of heritage languages is beneficial to the creation of sense of belonging for club members? Why or why not?

Do you have any additional thoughts or comments regarding heritage languages in cultural clubs and organization?

In composing these survey questions, the categorization of the survey questions provided us the means to look into different factors into looking at the development of sense of belonging. In regard to demographic information, it provided us information as to some of the students who were responding to our survey and some identity factors that could affect our results such as being a transfer student and a first-generation student. Secondly, we asked about the student's involvement, whether it be part of a cultural club or organization or a language club or

organization. This provides us information on the specific clubs and organizations that center language as part of the programming, allowing us to see if these specific clubs play into a student sense of belonging alongside cultural clubs and organizations if their specific club centers their heritage language. Lastly, the final two questions give us information on if the student themselves speak multiple languages and what heritage languages were in their household homes.

The first category provided us with an overall gauge as to the student's sense of belonging and some of the factors previously cited to affect a student's sense of belonging (O'Keefe 2013; Strayhorn 2012; Stebleton et al. 2014). This provided us a basis as to what a student's overall sense of belonging at Cal Poly is, but then was able to specifically cite some of the factors that are currently affecting the student's sense of belonging. In addition to this, the question on the student's sense of belonging due to their involvement can give us some insight on clubs and organizations in general as a factor in their experience, but also can provide us information as to if the presence of heritage language affects sense of belonging in comparison to the later questions regarding heritage language.

The next two following questions looks at the presence of cultural heritage and heritage language in the institution overall. Separating the two was a means to look at the possible variable of the presence of cultural heritage (whether it be traditions, music, food, etc.), which can often be tied and conflated to heritage language. This allows us to look at if it is heritage language in particular that affects a student's sense of belonging, and not simply the presence of someone's heritage culture. In addition to this, we can see if the presence of their cultural heritage and/or heritage language has positively or negatively affected the student's own personal identity.

Lastly, the final section focuses on their cultural club or organization and their experience within it. It continues to separate cultural heritage and heritage language but has the short answer questions to further elaborate on their experiences within their club or organization. This also provides student input in their perceptions of the presence heritage languages within cultural clubs and organizations and whether it is, in their own opinion, beneficial to the fostering of sense of belonging within students. The last question provides students space to share any last thoughts or comments regarding the topic.

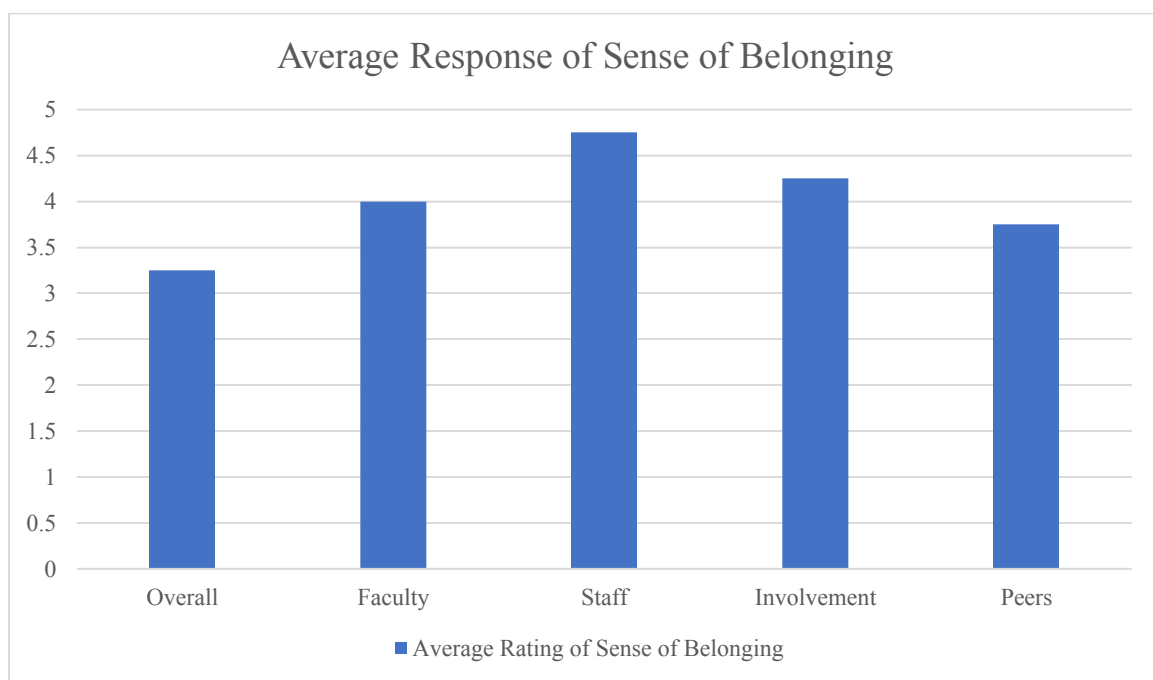
#### **IV. Limitations**

In regard to limitations, the primary limitation within this study is the fact that it is a survey done with only students of Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo. This means that the data will only represent the experiences of students at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo, rather than represent the experiences of students in higher education nationwide. In addition to this, the survey forgets to ask about the international student community, as there is no question in the demographic section that asks if the student is an international student. More limitations include the fact that this survey is focused on the experiences of students that are a member of cultural clubs and organizations, and those who might have a heritage language could be not involved in cultural clubs and organizations that can serve to be a comparison in regards to experience and rating of their sense of belonging. Lastly, a limitation is that not all heritage languages or cultural heritages will be represented in clubs and organizations—students have the capacity to start their own club and organization and therefore those with sufficient enough members will be able to create and maintain a club/organization. This means that certain cultural heritages/heritage languages will not be represented when looking at overall cultural clubs and organizations.

## V. Preliminary Results & Analysis

As of the end of the Spring quarter, there has only been 4 submitted responses to the survey sent out to Cal Poly students. This number overall does not suffice in the capacity to fully analyze the data and come to a conclusion, but we can still analyze the preliminary results to see possible trends so far.

Of the preliminary results, all of the respondents are non-transfer undergraduate students. One of the respondents are part of language clubs, but 75% of the respondents are part of a cultural club or organization, and the same number of respondents speak another language outside of English. 50% of the respondents are first-generation students.

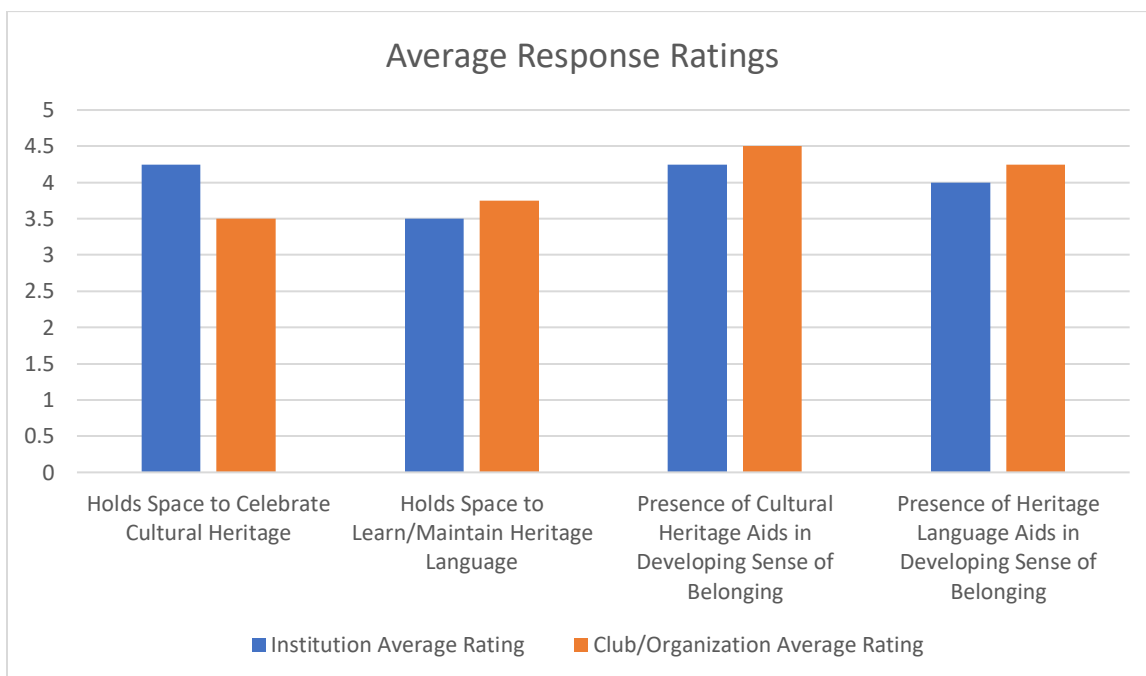


The chart above demonstrates the preliminary results in regard to the ratings of overall sense of belonging at their institution, due to their faculty, due to staff, due to their involvement, and due to their peers. The students were given a Likert-scale question and asked to rate their experience from a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). While the individually categories of factors are rated relatively well (4, 4.75, 4.25, and 3.75 respectively), overall, the average sense

of belonging rating is a 3.25 out of 5. Out of the four categories, involvement is shown to be the second most influential factor in fostering a sense of belonging, behind interactions with on-campus staff such as academic advisors, cultural center coordinators, and counselors.

Interestingly enough, when asked about the students' experience in their institution's acknowledgement of their heritage culture vs. their heritage language, heritage language scored slightly higher with an average of 3 while cultural heritage scored an average of 2.75. However, the inverse showed onwards, where the celebration of their cultural heritage is seen in more spaces than the learning and maintenance of heritage language (4.25 versus 3.5) alongside with their presence aiding in the development of the students of sense of belonging (4.25 for cultural heritage versus 4 for heritage language).

When looking at clubs and organizations in general, there shows to be an overall more positive difference in response as compared to the overall institution.



While many respondents did not elaborate on their experiences as tied to each question, an interesting point is brought up in regard to holding space to celebrate cultural heritage, where a

respondent notes that cultural clubs and organizations more so focus on social interactions rather than their cultural heritage, which might explain the negative difference between the institution and clubs/organizations within that prompt.

In regard to short answer responses, some of the notable responses cited that the presence of heritage language in clubs/organizations would be beneficial and create a more inclusive space. In addition to this, a few have cited that some clubs and organizations have offered workshops for members to learn their heritage language, but have not focused on heritage language and made it an integral part of their club/organizational programming and events.



## **VI. Conclusion**

In all, the preliminary results provide us some insight to the realities of sense of belonging in regard to the presence of cultural club and organizations. While more research needs to be done, it shows that there seems to be a positive relationship between the two, and that students view the presence of heritage language in their cultural club or organization to be beneficial. Much more, cultural clubs and organizations overall hold more space for the celebration for students' cultural heritage than the overall institution. The same case follows for the learning and maintenance of heritage languages, not counting language classes for the institution in general. For the future, it would be beneficial to expand on the research by looking at international students and their involvement, and in addition to this looking at students who are not involved in cultural clubs and organizations overall.

## **VII. Reflexión**

Mi experiencia con este proyecto es una experiencia de mucho aprendizaje del proceso de investigación en una institución de educación. Pienso que los momentos fundamentales era la escritura de la revisión de la literatura y el proceso de aprobación de IRB. Mi objetivo es seguir colectando datos y enviar el artículo para publicación en una revista académica con arbitraje ciego. En todo, aprendí más habilidades de investigación, y este proyecto me preparó para mi futuro, con mi meta de asistir las escuelas de postgrado.

Me divertí mucho con la revisión de la literatura, pero tenía problemas en saber qué dejar fuera. Hay mucha literatura que podía incluir en mi revisión porque este proyecto se enfoca en muchos tópicos: las lenguas de herencia, el sentido de pertenencia, las experiencias de los inmigrantes, la comunidad, etc. Hay mucho que quería aprender e incluir en la revisión de la

literatura, pero necesitaba un límite para decir que “ya es suficiente”. En el futuro, quiero poner un límite sobre la información que investigaré. Por ejemplo— con las lenguas de herencia, incluir su presencia en las escuelas, pero no investigar las lenguas de herencia en el contexto de las comunidades inmigrantes.

Con el proceso de aprobación del IRB, es un proceso que, en general, no me gusta, pero por esta experiencia, mi atención a los detalles en las encuestas es más fuerte y desarrollada. Era mucho trabajo, pero es una experiencia que me transformó en una investigadora mejor. Ahora sé que nivel de detalle necesito yo para que mis proyectos sean aceptados en el futuro.

Mientras mi proyecto no está completo en cuanto a la cantidad de participantes que respondieron, pienso que lo que aprendí durante el proceso es importante y útil para mi futuro. Es un poco de la experiencia de los estudiantes en las escuelas de postgrado, y este proyecto me transforma a una mejor estudiante y ahora, ¡estoy lista para lo que pasará en la escuela de postgrado!

## **VIII. Appendix**

### **A. Literature Review**

#### **Linguistic Diversity in Higher Education**

##### **INTRODUCTION**

With the passing of Proposition 58<sup>1</sup>, many California K-12 schools have begun to create a more linguistically diverse landscape in the promotion and implementation of dual immersion education and curriculum. Dual immersion education has shown to have its benefits throughout various studies such as cognitive development, developing interpersonal and intercultural skills, and helping to create a global, cross-cultural student and citizen (Zelasko and Antunezm 9-10). However, the conversations of having a linguistically diverse academic environment fail to continue and reach spaces of higher education in the United States, where much of the environment (both in academic and non-academic spaces) has been cultivated to center and use one language in particular: English. Many studies and research on the experiences of immigrant and their sense of belonging look to many different factors into their development of self in relation to their community, many of these looking into the role that language has determined an immigrant's sense of belonging.

##### **LANGUAGE EDUCATION**

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<sup>1</sup> Passed in November 8, 2016, Proposition repealed the bilingual education restrictions enforced of Proposition 227.

Before we look into talking about a linguistically diverse higher education, we must first look at the different terms surrounding multiple language education. The main type of program that we will highlight is the dual immersion program, also at times the dual language program. Genesee and Lindholm-Leary define this as “schooling at the elementary and/or secondary levels in which English along with another language is used for at least 50% of academic instruction during at least one school year” (254). It takes positions itself alongside the additive bilingual conceptualization of language learning, which posits that a child’s ability to speak multiple languages has various advantages that does not come at the expense or cost of the child’s first language. The end goal of dual immersions programs is the oral and written literacy of students in both their home/heritage language but also, in the case of the United State and Canada, English.

Meanwhile, the concept of bilingual education is not the same dual immersion education—rather having a contrasting definition based on the subtractive bilingual conceptualization of language learning. According to Kim Potowski, bilingual education is “for language minority students - which in reality do not promote bilingualism, but rather seek to transition students to all-English classrooms as soon as possible” (2). This comes in programs such as ESL (English as a Second/Secondary Language) classes, where students will be taken out of their normal class time to focus on bettering their oral and writing skills and literacy in English. With bilingual programs in the United States, the goal is push for assimilationism, giving students the capacity to speak English in the predominantly English-speaking environment.

In higher education within the United States, non-Native English speakers (namely international students and students coming from immigrant families) find themselves in an environment where the dominant and primary language is English. This often leaves their native/heritage language to be unused unless the student takes language classes in their

native/heritage language as part of the general education requirements or through their specific required courses for their degree. Meanwhile, institutions will often offer support for their skills and literacy in the English language—often having spaces and programs such as skill centers, tutors, and workshops to improve their ability in English. These students are often left to their own devices with their relationship with English, often on their own responsibility to reach out to the various support resources available in their institution (Snow Andrade et al. 219), following the ideas of bilingual education programs, but rather than having institutional scaffolding to support student’s education of English, the students themselves are to independently use the available support resources on their own volition.

Something to note is the diversity in levels of fluency of immigrants and international students in higher education—as Stebelton et al. notes, “More recent immigrant students (Wave Two arriving after age 13) often have unique issues such as mastery of English writing and reading skills as well as potential transition issues (e.g. identity development) compared with Wave One students, who likely attended elementary and secondary schools in the United States (Ngo, 2009; Olsen 1997)” (199). While non-Native English-speaking students might be in a position to need these resources, the depth of this need will vary between students depending on their previous experience and education in English.

Outside of the English-dominant sphere in higher education within the United States, opportunities to have an education that mirrors the education and curriculum is something not found outside of language-specific degrees or study abroad opportunities. For the former, such as the case of a Bachelor of Arts in Spanish, where a student will be taking classes in English and Spanish, there comes a lack of diversity in content and curriculum that is present in dual immersion programs. For example, the Bachelor of Arts in Spanish for California Polytechnic State

University, San Luis Obispo offers various classes in Spanish that focus on language, culture, and literature such as “Introduction to Spanish Linguistics” (SPAN 233), “Advanced Composition in Spanish (SPAN 301), and “Spanish and Latin American Film” (SPAN 307) (“Cal Poly Catalog”). While these courses offer the opportunity for students to take classes in Spanish, it does not have the depth of usage in dual immersion programs where student could, for example, learn biology or mathematics in Spanish<sup>2</sup>.

For study abroad programs, there will be opportunities to be able to take courses of multiple subjects in another language, but it is dependent on the specific study abroad program. However, the fact that study abroad programs are for a limited amount of time positions the program to reach a level of dual immersion but lack the consistency to have this level of exposure to the second language in other academic years and/or terms. Nonetheless, the study abroad program can offer an essential element of language learning that is not offered in institutions in the United States: an environment where English is not the primary language.

## **SENSE OF BELONGING**

In discussions and the literature exploring immigrant experiences and the experiences of students, there is often a concept that is often cited as a determinant in the experiences immigrant or students is sense of belonging. In the college context, Strayhorn defines sense of belonging as the “perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the group or

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<sup>2</sup> California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo’s course catalog for the 2020-2021 academic year does not offer biology, mathematics, or other STEM courses in Spanish, only offering “Medical Spanish for the Professions” for their “Selected Advanced Topics” (SPAN 470) course (“Cal Poly Catalog”).

others”(3). Karin Amit and Shirly Bar-Lev looks into the notions of sense of belonging, highlighting how Richard Black ties the idea of sense of belonging to the feeling of being “at home”, using the in terms interchangeably, highlighting the idea that sense of belonging is (1) a subjective feeling (2) dynamic and changing upon events and experiences (3) can be held with a social group/in physical or imaginary space. Much more, they note how the idea of “home” is “an imagined or desired locus of belief and yearning, a space that may carry spiritual, emotional, nationalist, and patriotic connotations” (948).

Within these definitions of sense of belonging, language is left out of the conversation. However, Máiréad Craith brings up the idea of “languaculture”, coined by Paul Friedrich and later on developed by Michael Agar, in the exploration of sense of belonging in written narratives of immigrants. In particular, the way that language and culture, despite being two entities, are tied and related to each other, and it is something that can have a personal relationship to people (127). This understanding of sense of belonging with relation to language and culture can be paralleled in particular to a theoretical framework for Indigenous experiences of sense of belonging for Indigenous students in higher education: the peoplehood matrix. This framework posits that language, sacred history, ceremonial cycle, and land as four intertwining factors in the personhood of Indigenous peoples; all four factors are needed to help develop a sense of belonging in Indigenous students within higher education (Tachine et al. 789-790). In this sense, we can recontextualize the relationship of sense of belonging with language: language can be a determinant of sense of belonging, so long that there is a personal connection to language that is permeable through one’s experience of acceptance and importance in a socio-cultural group or space.

## **STUDENT RETENTION & ATTRITION**

In regard to the impacts of sense of belonging for students, it provides to be a means to increase student retention, decrease the rate of student attrition within institutions of higher education. Various forms of programming such as orientation and faculty-student or peer mentorships are used to facilitate space where new and transfer students can find and build a community, creating the sense of belonging students need to be encouraged to stay within their particular institution of higher education. While everyone student has the potential to leave their institution, certain are positioned to be at more risk of doing so, in particular ethnic minorities, first generation students, students with disabilities, students of socioeconomic status, and probationary students (O’Keeffe 605-606). Despite these efforts, an overseen aspect of identity and experience that is left unaddressed is language and linguistic diversity within higher education and how fostering an environment that gives space for multiple languages to be spoken can increase student retention/decrease rates of student attrition.

In looking to the best approach to develop a sense of belonging for students in higher education, previous theories and frameworks were created to look into actions that can be taken by students, faculty, and staff to foster an environment that cultivates this sense of belonging and the factors that play into the creation of a sense of belonging. One of the most well-known of this is Vincent Tinto’s concept of integration into the college setting. Tinto theorizes that involvement in the academic and social life become a determinant in the retention of students in higher education. These experiences need to be able to align and be congruent with the goals that the student has. This can play on a formal level (grade performance and extracurricular activities for academic and social respectively) and on an informal level (faculty-student interactions and peer-group interactions).



Some have criticized this approach to building a sense of belonging for students due to some of the aspects of integration that he discusses, such as William G. Tierney, citing that “Tinto's theory of college student retention misses the mark for minority students. With its implicit suggestions that such students must assimilate into the cultural mainstream and abandon their ethnic identities to succeed on predominantly White campuses, Tinto's framework is faulted not only for overlooking the history of ethnic oppression and discrimination in the U.S. but also for being theoretically flawed” (80). He continues on, naming this assimilationism as cultural suicide, rather encouraging a framework of cultural integrity within higher education and rethinking how to foster a sense of belonging for minority students that is not at the cost of their culture.

In John Bean's concepts of socialization, he builds upon Tinto's studies and theory and rather emphasizes environmental factors such finances, opportunity to transfer, and outside friends and how it directly affects dropout syndrome, which he defines as “is, a conscious, openly discussed intention to leave an institution coupled with actual attrition” (36). He breaks down external factors into academic factors, social-psychological factors, and environmental factors. In addition to this, Bean consolidates all of the internal factors into one category that composes of college grades (affected by academic factors), institutional fit, and institutional commitment (affected by social-psychological factors). From this, he points out that while external factors can have a positive relationship with internal factors, and therefore position a student in a place that fosters a sense of belonging, environmental factors such as finances can supersede these positive factors when negative and cause a student leave their institution.

Another framework is Joseph Berger and Jeffrey Milem's theory of college involvement, where the two continue building upon the previous models, with this model specifically involving the concept of “involvement” within higher education. In particular, they postulate that there is a

cycle in which the involvement in fall semester is a determinant in the perceptions of institutional and peer support, which in turn becomes a determinant for the involvement of a student in spring semester. The cycle then continues, following back to fall semester (658). Altogether, this involvement plays into sense of belonging—where positive involvement leads to positive perceptions of institutional and peer support, resulting in the cultivation of a sense of belonging and increasing the chances of student retention.

In all of these theories, make socio-cultural factors are taken into account in order to postulate the possible factors and determinant in fostering in the sense of belonging in students to help lower rates of student attrition. When looking at language, the only theory that has a possible tie to language lies in Tierney's critique of Tinto, where he advocates for cultural integrity rather than cultural suicide. Tinto's concept of integration actively go against the purposes of linguistic diversity, as it asks students to compromise their culture (and in turn, when thinking about the concept of "languaculture", their language) to be able to assimilate to the culture of the United States. While Bean's concepts of socialization and Berger and Milem's theory of college involvement both take into account social factors in the sense of belonging (such as interactions within their institution), it falls short of considering different ways this interaction can partake. In a sense, Bean, Berger, and Milem all fail to look into the role of what language these interactions might partake in: are they student-faculty interactions that pass in English? Or do they happen in the heritage languages of the student and faculty member?

## **EXPERIENCES IN IMMIGRATION & EDUCATION**

While these theories try to provide answers to the concerns of sense of belong within higher education, it is important to look into the realities and the experiences of these students, in particular immigrant and international students, and how they foster a sense of belonging. O’Keefe sets the stage for understanding the beginning of experiences of students, stating that “For first year students, their entry to university may coincide with a period of instability in their lives, which can disrupt the capacity of students to persist with their studies” (606). Stebelton et al. continues this narrative, specifically highlighting the experiences of immigrant students and how “Students may feel like strangers of border crossers, feeling that they no longer belong in their home culture, yet not quite feeling like they fit into the academic community of higher education (Rendón, 1996)” (201). Students find themselves looking to foster a sense of belonging for themselves, and much more, immigrant and international students are positioned into needing this sense of belonging into seeing themselves as fit within their institution.

When looking at the role of language with sense of belonging, the experiences of immigrants become a source of prior knowledge and information in regarding how they facilitate their languages in their cultivation of identity and sense of belonging in a new culture and society. Máiréad Craith writes on the role of language in immigration, stating that “This movement between languages may involve some elements of choice and migrants may seek to assimilate themselves to the new environment as completely as possible and engage fully with the new language (translational assimilation). Alternatively, they may continue with the regular use of the language of their birth while acquiring and speaking the language of the host community only where necessary or appropriate (translational accommodation)” (4). For immigrant students, this might be some of their experiences in higher education as they navigate an institution (and a larger society) that requires them to assimilate to the larger culture. The assimilationism displayed

mirrors the Tinto's previously mentioned concept of integration into the college setting and the critique that was displayed. Stebleton et al. notes that "Prior research has demonstrated that immigrant students experience a lesser sense of belonging on 4-year, research institutions compared with nonimmigrant student (Stebleton, Huesman, & Kuzhabekova, 2010)" (197). Could Tierney's cultural integrity with the applied lens of language be a means to increase this sense of belonging within immigrant students?

## **THE ROLE OF THE UNIVERSITY**

Sense of belonging is something that is both cultivated and hindered by an institution, O'Keefe notes. While a university can create programming and environments that promote a sense of belonging, there are factors that can lead to a barrier in the fostering of a sense of belonging such as "financial pressures faced by universities, which have led to larger class sizes, higher teacher-student ratios and the extensive use of online learning materials have exacerbated this disconnection" (607). It is important the look at the structures already in place that foster a sense of belonging in students and denote where linguistic diversity can hold a place. As previously mentioned, higher education institutions in the United States often do not hold a sufficient enough scaffolding to reach the levels of multiple language speaking present within dual immersion programs in K-12 education.

In looking at the role of the university, exploring the already established factors can give better insight how to better incorporate a linguistically diverse environment. Some of the in regard to academic factors include positive faculty-student relationships and interactions (O'Keefe 608-609; Stebleton et al. 200-201 Meeuwse et al. 532), and targeted academic support (Stebleton et

al. 200). For the former, O’Keefe notes the importance of relationship between students and faculty, stating that “The motivation arising from a positive relationship that a student has with their faculty has been widely documented... Komarrju (2010, p. 332) contends that ‘students successfully knowing one faculty member closely are likely to feel more satisfied with their college life and aspire to go further in their careers’ (607-08). In relations to talking about language and Tierney’s idea of cultural integrity, a faculty-student relationship that is held in another language can demonstrate practices of cultural integrity for the student that can better foster an environment for a sense of belonging.

When looking at targeted academic support, Stebleton initially frames it as looking at the differences of experience between immigrant students and non-immigrant students. However, in discussion about language, we can see how targeted academic support can dictate the prevalence of language in the academic career of a student. As an example, if a native French speaker is seeking academic advise on literature classes to take as part of their general education requirements, an academic advisor will take into account their previous history with literature courses, but also look into literature classes in French that will help include the student’s heritage language into their academic career. This practice of targeted academic support further calls back to the idea of dual immersion programs: not only is the purpose of academic advising to support the student in their academic career, but also incorporate as best as possible, the remnants of a dual immersion program into their academic career.

In regard to student affairs, it has been shown that, in particular, the existence and involvement in cultural centers (Tachine et al. 798-799; Stebelton et al. 200) have affected students’ sense of belonging. Cultural centers aim to serve and create a space for minority students and find itself of importance. Stebleton et al. writes on its importance, stating that “actual physical

spaces—multicultural learning centers, advising offices, women’s centers, spaces for student cultural organizations—are vital to helping students to feel connected to the campus as they help promote a sense of belonging. Physical spaces can serve as a norm of symbolism and means of honor tradition” (200). Tachine et al. further elaborates this experience for Indigenous students, stating that “Several students identified the Native student center as a place where students could ‘be themselves,’ and they stated that it ultimate provided a ‘homelike’ environment.... At the Native center, students developed family (kinship) bonds and recognized each other by those familiar terms in their Native languages—core components of the peoplehood model (Holm et al., 2003)—which fostered a localized sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2012)” (798-799). Here we see how cultural centers existence helps normalize the existence and experiences of minority experiences. Much more, in the experience of Indigenous students in Native centers, they have the capacity to be connected to their language, showing the ways that language can play a part in cultural centers. Cultural centers, therefore, provide to be pivotal in the role of linguistic diversity in higher education: as an institutional place that normalizes the existence and welcomes minority students, the way that the cultures and heritages of these students are presented and exist within this space can dictate how they exist in the larger institution. If multiple languages can exist in the space of the cultural center, multiple languages can exist in the institution.

## **CONCLUSION**

Despite the changing landscape of K-12 education in regard to the increased existence linguistically diverse educational programs, namely dual immersion programs, there is little to no conversation about linguistic diversity in the higher education context. A major topic discussed in higher education is the concept of sense of belonging. Many theories have been developed as a

means to explore the factors that cultivate a sense of belonging in students as a means to better support student retention. Linguistic diversity is missing in these conversations of sense of belonging, as we see the ties between language and culture within immigrant students and can further recontextualize this to apply for all students in the university. Spaces like cultural centers and interactions such as a faculty-student relationship have shown to foster this sense of belonging—but can show to possibly more potentiate in considering these spaces and interactions in a linguistically diverse context.

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## B. IRB Submission Approval



**Humans Subjects Research IRB <hs-irb@calpoly.edu>**  
Mon 6/1/2020 11:30 AM  
To: Lou. Ibe; Human Subjects Research IRB; Lou. Ibe; Silvia Marijuan



Research team:

The Cal Poly Institutional Review Board (IRB) has conducted an expedited review of the human subjects research project, "Sense of Belonging, Heritage Language, and Clubs and Organizations," and has issued approval for you to proceed with the project.

The approval extends through 5/10/2021. If your data analysis continues beyond this date, please contact the Cal Poly IRB about an extension of approval.

Click here to access application: [Protocol Approval Form](#)

Please be aware that it is your responsibility as the persons in charge of this research project to ensure that, with respect to human subjects, the work is carried out as described in the proposal and the rights of the subjects are fully protected.

You have listed the following Grants Development numbers as associated with this project: N/A

If the associated GDO numbers change, you will need to submit a modification request through IRB Manager. The IRB protocol number associated with this project is: 2020-114

We wish you success in your research efforts.